



# ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

## Episcopal Church & Student Center

1309 R Street \* Lincoln, NE 68508 \* (402) 474-1979 \* [www.stmarks-episcopal.org](http://www.stmarks-episcopal.org)

The Rev. Deacon Ryan Hall  
Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, RCL Year A  
St. Mark's on the Campus  
March 30, 2008

### “PETER AND DOUBT”

Acts 2: 14a, 22-23	Psalm 16	1 Peter 1: 3-9	Assigned Gospel: John 20: 19-31 Read Gospel: John 21: 15-19
--------------------	----------	----------------	----------------------------------------------------------------

For those Episcopalians like myself who thoroughly enjoy our informal motto of “We've always done it that way”, I feel I probably owe an apology. As I announced before I read the Gospel, I decided to change the gospel reading from the 20<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John to the 21<sup>st</sup> and final Chapter of John. I will let you in on a little secret: sometimes I really do not like the Revised Common Lectionary. Most of the time, the lectionary is just fine. There are Sundays, however, where I just do not understand the thinking behind the pairings of Bible readings we get. This is one of those Sundays.

Every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, we get the gospel reading that we were supposed to read today. It is the story of “Doubting” Thomas. The obvious impetus for preachers being to preach on the nature of Doubt and Faith. This does make some sense because the twitter and glitter of the Easter Vigil and Holy Week is over, the chocolate Easter bunnies have been consumed, and we are left to ponder what it means to be a People of the Resurrection in a skeptical age where science and what can be scientifically proven is what is normative.

Faith and Doubt, or Faith versus Doubt go hand in hand. Certainly, they are themes worthy of discussion and reflection on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter. Giving that we have two other readings, a snippet from a sermon from the Book of Acts and one from a letter, both from the Apostle Peter, that if we are going to talk about Doubt and Faith, it makes more sense for me to talk about the Post-Resurrection Account of Jesus and Peter, and not the same old Story of “Doubting” Thomas that we get every single 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Eastertide.

I say that this reading about Peter and Jesus is more poignant when talking about the nature of Faith and Doubt because if you read the story of “Doubting” Thomas (and do read it sometime this week in your personal prayer and reflection time) that “Doubting” Thomas always gets a bad rap and Peter gets a free pass, when it should be the other way around.

Thomas was behaving pretty much as anyone these days would behave. He needed rational, scientific proof before he believed in the Resurrection. And as far as I read that story, Jesus seemed to have understood that, for he forgives Thomas on the spot. It is only subsequent Christians who want to attach this rather demeaning title of “Doubter” to Thomas. As far as the Gospel is concerned on the issue of Thomas and Doubt, the matter seems to be closed as far as our Savior Jesus is concerned.

Peter, however, is a completely different story. When was the last time we saw Peter? If you think back to Holy Week, the last time we saw Peter was at the Last Supper and the subsequent events of Good Friday. Jesus had told his disciples that by the end of the night, they would all desert him. And Peter, in his boisterous way, emphatically denied that that would happen. You can almost picture his shaking his head and saying, “No, Lord, I will never desert you. I will fight for you to the bitter end.”

And of course, in the well known turn of phrase, Jesus tells Peter that by the time the cock crows three times, you, of all people, will have denied me three times. And of course, Peter denies it. But as the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday stories play out, that is exactly what happened. When Jesus is arrested and taken before his Monkey Trial, Peter is always hovering in the background. Servants and guards in the various versions of the story always ask him if he is with this Jesus, and Peter emphatically denies that he knows the man. In a few of the gospel readings, the scripture verses tell us that he even emphatically adds profane curses to his vehement denials of Jesus.

Then the cock crows, and Peter remembers what Jesus had foretold, and he goes off and weeps. And other than a curious little verse in Luke where Peter, having learned that the tomb is empty, runs to see for himself. He suddenly reappears and preaches this sermon on the day of Pentecost from the reading from Acts that we get this morning. Otherwise, this snippet from the gospel lesson I read this morning from John is the only time where Peter reappears in any of the gospels after the Holy Week goes on.

If you want to talk about Doubt, Faith, and Guilt, Peter had plenty of it, much more so that poor “Doubting” Thomas. Peter had so much doubt in Jesus' greatest hour of need that he had denied the very man he had sworn to fight for to the bitter end. Ironically, after Jesus' death and resurrection and all the chaos that entailed in the minds of his followers, his disciples did the only thing they knew how to cope with the situation, they go back to work. Jesus reappears on the side of the sea, and Peter, so racked with guilt, sees Jesus and dives into the water, even though the verse says he was not wearing any clothes at the time.

They haul in the boat, and we have this uncomfortable conversation between Peter and Jesus. Jesus, reminding Peter that he had denied him 3 times, asks him three times, “Do you love me?” And even with all that guilt because of Doubt that Peter was carrying, Jesus was still willing to forgive him. And not just to forgive him, but have a job for him.

Is that not true of all of us as well? The Collect for the Day is this:

Almighty and Everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

God is always there no matter how much doubt or what baggage we have. Jesus is there by the shore waiting for us with a job for us to do, and a seat for us in the Kingdom of God. We all have doubts and there is nothing wrong with that as long as those doubts do not prevent us from sitting down in the chair Jesus has set out for us.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?... Then Feed my sheep.”

Amen.